

AN INVESTIGATION OF LARGE SCALE IN PAINTING

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

As a painter, I have been working the past few years to develop a mature pictorial image and the concepts of space that were flexible enough for me to produce what I believed was a valid art statement. I have investigated several avenues for improving my work, i.e., acquiring certain technical painting skills, reading more to broaden my concepts and imagination, and visiting various art galleries and museums.

During an earlier critique it was realized that the majority of my paintings were all very similar in scale. I decided to approach my work on a much larger scale than previously attempted in the hopes of discovering a better, or at least different painting concept.

To investigate large scale I decided, as my creative project, to construct and paint five large paintings. They were to be larger than any previous work. The objective of my project was to determine how painting on a large scale might affect the development of the painted image and my concept of space. A written journal was utilized in the studio for noting observations made during the development of each piece. The completed pieces were documented with color slides and were compared with slides of a selected group of four earlier paintings.

The previous paintings offered base line data for comparing the imagery, spatial concepts, physical and economic problems with the paintings from this project.

Each new piece was to be no smaller than forty-eight square feet which was twice the scale of any previously painted piece. Initially, I planned to complete five pieces in a five-month period of time; however, after consultation with my graduate committee, the number was changed to three pieces.

The primary concerns during the creation of the three pieces were

1. physical;
2. spatial;
3. imagery; and
4. additional insights.

My creative project therefore was executed in two phases. First, the paintings were constructed and painted, while data relating to each was simultaneously recorded in my journal. Second, the written report was developed with information from the written journal, with "additional insights" concerning comparisons between slides of the earlier works and the three works completed for the project.

The three paintings from the creative project will be designated project pieces #1, #2, and #3. The previously painted work used for comparison will be designated as study paintings. All slides referred to in the paper have been included in Appendix A. The study paintings selected for

commentary were chosen because they most typically represented my earlier work in regards to imagery and spatial concepts. Each work will be discussed seperately and then collectively.

CHAPTER II

COMMENTARY ON PROJECT PIECES

Observations concerning the project pieces will be better understood by first making note of certain characteristics of the study paintings. The study paintings were all painted with oil paint on canvas and were small enough to be easily carried by one person. The iconography in the study paintings was of a personal nature, with each figurative image having a literal connotation. The painted images exist in a fantasy or dreamlike illusion of infinite space (slides 1, 3, 4 and 6).

This paper is primarily concerned with scale, imagery and spatial concepts, however, these elements cannot be adequately discussed without first introducing the physical and economic problems that evolved while preparing the different painting grounds.

#1

Slides 7 through 11, Appendix A

Vertical panel--6'x18'

Floor panel--2'x5'x10'

Physical and Economic Concerns: Money became one of the initial considerations when estimating the cost of the materials. For economic reasons I decided to build the first place with

used lumber purchased from a salvage company. This would allow me to work with a type of wood I had never used before.

Slides two and five show the amount of wood used in constructing the study paintings and slides seven and nine reveal the structure of project piece #1. I discovered that when the scale increases, the amount of wood bracing must increase proportionately in order to give adequate support and to prevent the structure from warping.

The size limitation of my studio posed a definite physical problem while constructing the first piece. The vertical panel of the first piece was built outside the studio and the bottom of its surrounding frame had to be sawed off four inches before it could be brought back into the studio.

Slides eight and nine depict how the platform part of the piece had to be constructed with a detachable step to enable it to fit through the door. Each part of the piece had to be carefully planned in advance so everything would fit together properly and could be transported without damaging the piece.

Another major consideration was the purchase of canvas. The scale I would attempt was restricted by the amount and width of canvas I could afford to buy. The large canvas that was used was difficult to stretch and had to be restretched once because its own weight caused it to sag.

Time was an unexpected consideration that had to be dealt with by budgeting my working hours more efficiently.

Time was a physical problem with regards to man-hours in the studio. The study paintings were each completed in ten days or less, while project piece #1 took over five weeks to complete.

Spatial Concepts:

The large scale greatly altered my concept of space. In the study paintings I thought of my paintings as windows through which one could observe the illusions of my own personal fantasies. The large scale canvas was so much bigger than any "window" that I began to think of my piece as a wall on which to build or paint something. For the first time I was dealing with real space as well as illusionary space. Real space was the area the piece occupied and the space around it, while illusionary space was that space created on canvas with perspective and color.

I became infatuated with the real space because the scale seemed to demand a believable setting, that is to say, the piece needed its own environment in which to exist. Unlike the study paintings it was not small and portable, and could not be displayed just anywhere. Due to the necessity for an environment of its own, I constructed a three-dimensional platform for the front of the piece. I had originally planned to merely paint the illusion of this platform on the canvas. The new concept of space turned my thinking away from creating paintings for an environment to creating paintings that were in themselves an environment.

Imagery:

The large scale affected my imagery in three major ways. First, the imagery in project piece #1 is less figurative than in the study paintings. When one paints life-size or smaller the figurative image can be uninhibiting, but when the same figure is painted larger than life-size it can become very threatening and alter the original content or concept.

The second major change concerning imagery is the shift of emphasis from the figure to the entire painted surface. In the study paintings the figures are very richly painted while the backgrounds, or surrounding areas are basically broad, flat areas of color. The entire surface of project piece #1 was treated with equal complexity and richness of color (note slides 1 and 10).

The third change was the introduction of mixed media to the canvas. The study paintings were painted entirely with oil paint. Project piece #1 incorporated the use of oils, acrylics, gesso, pencil, pastel, crayon, and spray paint. The larger scale forced me to work more rapidly to readily visualize a complete thought on the canvas, thus leading me to use the faster media like acrylic, pastel, etc.

Additional Insight:

The final form of project piece #1 seemed to be more personal and unique than any of the study paintings. I think this is because the larger scale forced me to get more

personally involved with the piece, and to constantly be aware of the environment the piece created. The final form of the study paintings was primarily influenced by my intellectual concept of what a painting should be as opposed to it evolving, like project piece #1, from a multiplicity of external factors like shape, space, materials, etc.

#2

Slides 12 through 14, Appendix A

Nine Panels--2'x8' each

Physical and Economic Concerns:

With project piece #2 I decided to use masonite for a painting surface instead of canvas to eliminate the problem of sagging canvas. Even though masonite was used, much more wood was needed to build the nine panels of project piece #2 than any of the study paintings required (compare slides 2 and 6).

The water-base paint and drawing media would not adhere effectively to the masonite without first lightly sanding the surface. At times I had to stand on a stool and work with my pastels attached to the tip of a yardstick. The top panel was too tall to reach while standing on the floor (see slide 13).

I made a concentrated effort to build project piece #2 in such a manner that it would weigh as little as possible because I had so much difficulty manipulating project piece #1.

Spatial Concepts:

In project piece #2 I continued to work with the area around the painting to develop an environment for the piece. This would better relate the painting to the room as opposed to it merely hanging on the wall to be viewed.

A second idea that developed with project piece #2 was the subtle involvement of the viewer with the piece. The viewer would need to walk across the five floor panels in order to sufficiently see the smaller areas of color on the piece, thus, physically involving himself with the piece.

My initial plan of using four panels on the wall and repeating that motif with four panels on the floor was altered because four panels were not enough to visually balance the pieces on the wall.

Imagery:

The image became even less figurative than in project piece #1. The image was more colorful which is due, I believe, to my reaction to the dark masonite painting surface.

I was not as dependent upon my preliminary sketch to complete the imagery in this piece as I was with any of the study paintings. The imagery of project piece #2 originated largely from the physical structure itself. In other words, the shape and size of the structure seemed to demand a certain image and atmosphere that could only be realized after the piece was begun.

Project piece #2 seemed to make a statement on its own, while the study paintings seemed to be dependent primarily on the painted, figurative image to make a statement. That is to say the study paintings offer only a two-dimensional painted image for consideration and are dependent upon that image for consideration and are dependent upon that image alone for the strength of their impact. Project piece #2 offers a painted image plus a three-dimensional structure that could exist unpainted as a piece of sculpture. This combination of two and three-dimensional elements produces a more harmonious statement than do either of the two separately.

Additional Insight:

The most exciting discovery with project piece #2 was that I had begun to respond more to the materials with which I was working than merely illustrating a previously conceived idea as was the case in all the study paintings.

When working on the study paintings I would think of an idea and then paint that idea in one medium, generally oil paint. I seldom incorporated mixed media in my earlier work because I felt the original thought should dictate the final outcome of the painting, not external factors such as media. During project piece #2 I realized that scale had successfully affected the outcome of the piece and that scale was an external factor. I decided that if scale could do so much for the development of the piece then I could justify using

any external stimuli that was necessary to make a better statement.

#3

Slides 15 through 20, Appendix A

Three Panels--8'x16' total

Physical and Economic Problems:

The physical structure had to be well planned in advance due to the exactness necessary in building a large triptych. The eight-by-sixteen-foot piece had to be constructed in such a way that it could be disassembled for passage through a normal doorway. This was accomplished by attaching the right and left panels with hinges with removable pins.

The center panel was constructed by combining two four-by-eight-foot masonite panels by means of two five-foot, treaded, metal rods attached permanently in the top panel. The rods passed through holes in the bottom panel and were secured with nuts at the base of the bottom panel (see slide 15). Once assembled it required four people to raise the piece to an upright position. Wheels were attached to the base of all the panels for ease of mobility in the upright position.

When the piece was completed, I noticed the long sheets of masonite had warped slightly due to the intense humidity for a two-week period prior to completion.

Spatial Concepts:

The concept of involving the viewer with the piece was considered in project piece #3 before I began to build. The free-standing triptych has drawn and painted imagery on both sides of the panels so the viewer must walk around the piece in order to see it in its entirety.

The illusionistic space of project piece #3 has brought to light a major change in the way I perceive the painted, figurative image in relationship to its "painted environment." In the study paintings the painted figure was surrounded by a three-dimensional environment or setting. Instead of painting the illusion of a setting, I have now constructed the actual setting for the painted imagery.

Imagery:

The painted imagery in project piece #3 is more intense than in the study paintings, both in strength of hue and value. This might have resulted from the piece being so large that I was forced to work very close to it. In all probability this caused me to concentrate more on detail and to make each panel as intense as possible (compare slides 3 and 20).

The most difficult part of project piece #3 was developing an image on both sides of the piece that would relate to each other and visually balance the two sides. The back panel was completely repainted three times before I felt it was analagous with the front panel.

The painted imagery in project piece #3 is similar to that in the study paintings in that there are "floating" biomorphic forms on the front of the panels. However, the painted imagery on the back side of project piece #3 is different in two respects from the imagery in the study paintings. First, the shapes are much more linear, and second, they are more complicated with forms painted within forms.

I think the change in imagery was due, in part, to the two different structural shapes confronting me when looking at the front and back panels of project piece #3 individually (note slides 15 and 17).

Additional Insight:

The most interesting observation of project piece #3 was the concept of incorporating sculptural shapes and spaces into a painting. I was no longer dependent completely upon the painted image to produce a strong aesthetic experience, but could now consider physical shape, size and space as well.

Upon completing the third project I realized that each piece was unique in its own individual way. The study paintings came from two different series of paintings with generally three to six paintings in each series. I did not look at the project pieces as a series, because each had a physical structure so different than its predecessor that it demanded its own unique statement.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose and the problem of my creative project was to determine how painting on a large scale might affect the development of the imagery and spatial concepts in my work.

I had originally planned to construct four or five pieces; but, due to the unexpected amount of time and money involved in project piece #1, I changed the number to three pieces. The three pieces produced a wealth of information concerning the development of imagery and spatial concepts.

The larger scale affected the development of imagery in a number of ways. First, the final form of the image in the project pieces changed significantly from conception to completion. The final form of the imagery in the study paintings is generally very close to its preliminary pencil sketch. This change or metamorphosis of the imagery was brought about, in part, by the incorporation of wood, canvas, masonite and assorted hardware in the project pieces. This introduction of various media broke down my previous inhibitions concerning painting with mixed media.

The imagery was less literal and figurative in the project pieces than the study paintings. The large scale caused me to be more concerned with the entire surface of the canvas

instead of just the figurative elements on the canvas. When one views a large scale painting up close there are no insignificant areas as is sometimes the case in the study paintings.

The last major development of imagery, instigated by the large scale, was the influence of the large shapes of the pieces had on the final image. After the initial sketch was placed on the surface to be painted it seems as if a metamorphosis of that image would begin to take place as I walked on and around the piece. In other words, I could plan the size and shape of the piece but could not predetermine the outcome of the painted image.

The large scale affected my concepts of both real and illusionary space. One of the first considerations of real space was to determine how big a piece could be constructed in the studio and in the gallery. So the final form the piece would take is affected very early by the scale it is allowed to be.

The crowded studio situation reduced the amount of physical distance between myself and the piece I was working with, creating a closeness that forced me to become more involved with the entire surface of the piece.

Real space was a key element when trying to anticipate how much viewer participation would be involved with the piece. If I wanted the piece to be viewed from up close I had to design a means of directing people that would not be a distraction

from the piece. In project pieces number one and two this was accomplished by constructing a wooden platform to be walked upon. In project piece number three the viewer participation was accomplished by slightly closing the doors of the piece; this forced the viewer to come very close to the piece in order to see what was painted on the inside front and side panels.

The large scale affected the depth of the illusionistic space and made it more shallow. This happened because the large pieces occupied so much real space that it was not necessary to indicate as much illusionary space to maintain the content of the painting.

Of somewhat lesser importance, but still a factor to be considered, was the expense involved in construction of the project pieces. The study paintings averaged eighteen dollars apiece for the project pieces. The large scale required more preplanning than the study paintings due to their complexity. The project pieces required five to six times as many days to complete as the study paintings. The large pieces required extra help in assembling and moving them from the studio to the gallery.

In addition to these areas affected by the larger scale, there were three very significant discoveries and conclusions brought to light by the creative project. First, as alluded to throughout the summary, I discovered that significant elements in my work can be derived from such external sources as

scale, choice of materials, shape and space. In other words, I now respond to the materials and environment at hand instead of trying to mentally complete the painting before executing it physically.

Second, I concluded that the pictorial elements in my work could be visualized with a variety of media combinations. Restricting one's choice of media can be just as stagnating as restricting the sources for one's imagery.

The third and most significant discovery was that I now perceive painting as the creation of a complete aesthetic environment. In the past I painted with the piece. The creative project enabled me to disregard any inhibitions I previously had concerning what a painting should be.

APPENDIX A

SLIDE IDENTIFICATION

Slide No.

1. Study Painting, front view.
2. Study Painting, back view, under construction.
3. Study Painting, front view.
4. Study Painting, front view.
5. Study Painting, back view, under construction
6. Study Painting, front view.
7. Project Piece #1, back view.
8. Project Piece #1, detail of floor panel.
9. Project Piece #1, detail, underside of floor panel.
10. Project Piece #1, front view, doors open.
11. Project Piece #1, front view, doors closed.
12. Project Piece #2, detail, underside of panels.
13. Project Piece #2, detail, of painting in process.
14. Project Piece #2, front view.
15. Project Piece #3, detail, inside construction.
16. Project Piece #3, front view.
17. Project Piece #3, back view.
18. Project Piece #3, back view.
19. Project Piece #3, detail, back panel.
20. Project Piece #3, detail, front panel.







































